

**Extended-Day** Enrichment Programs:

# Expanding Family Engagement Opportunities for Schools

## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT REACHES **BEYOND** THE SCHOOL DAY

Every hour students spend at school beyond normal class time is a golden opportunity to enhance their educational experience, explore interests, and build skills for success. This additional time also offers more opportunities to connect with and engage families as well.



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## INTRODUCTION

# What Family Engagement Looks Like



In [December 2021](#), U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona highlighted the need for increased family engagement in schools, stating that meaningful engagement “has never been more important.” In fact, if you look at the current strategic plan for any school or district in the county, there is a very good chance that “increasing family engagement” is one of the goals stated in that plan.

That raises a couple of questions: What is “meaningful engagement”? What does it look like? An excellent answer to the first question comes from the National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement (NAFSCE). The association [defines](#) family engagement as: **“a shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families... and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children’s learning and development.”**

Educators trying to determine what meaningful engagement with families would look like can keep an eye on three main traits:

1

### ACTIVE, ONGOING, AND POSITIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS’ FAMILIES



- Schools would use multiple channels (e.g., face-to-face, email, online portals, SMS text, voice calls, etc.) to ensure they’re reaching each family through that family’s preferred mode of communication.
- Information would flow two ways, so teachers gain insights on how students’ home lives affect learning and families obtain details about their child’s studies and how best to provide support.
- Strong, trusting family-teacher relationships would arise from the ongoing communication.





2

## AT-HOME SUPPORT OF TEACHERS' EFFORTS

Families would reinforce their children's learning and motivation for learning by:

- Asking thoughtful questions about class and school activities
- Encouraging their children to read
- Providing a distraction-free location and structured at-home time for completing homework assignments
- Implementing support practices suggested by teachers
- Conveying positive attitudes and expectations about school and learning
- Having children participate in out-of-school educational experiences such as library or museum visits as well as summer and before/after school programs.

3

## FAMILY-EDUCATOR COLLABORATION WITHIN SCHOOLS

As they're able, families would become part of the school's environment and support network by:

- Attending family-teacher conferences
- Volunteering for fundraisers and other school initiatives
- Serving as teaching assistants, classroom aides, and in other needed roles
- Participating in school governance
- Building resource conduits between schools and community agencies or businesses.

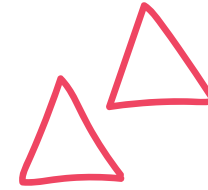
This last trait also illustrates that students are not the only ones who benefit from family engagement in schools. In the [words](#) of the Parent Teacher Association:



**When families are engaged, teachers also feel more supported and the atmosphere at the school is more positive and welcoming.**



# Research on the Impact of Family Engagement



Family engagement is such a strong predictor of students' academic success that researchers found the connection across [50 different studies](#). The effect on academic performance was so powerful that authors of that analysis wrote that "family-school relations and parental involvement in education have been identified as a way to close demographic gaps in achievement and maximize students' potential."

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) also analyzed 51 studies in the fourth edition of its [report](#), *A New Wave of Evidence*. The organization stated:



**"The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life."**

– A New Wave of Evidence by SEDL

## THE REPORT ALSO FOUND THAT STUDENTS WITH INVOLVED FAMILIES WERE MORE LIKELY TO:

- ✓ Earn higher grades and test scores as well as enroll in higher-level programs
- ✓ Be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits
- ✓ Attend school regularly
- ✓ Have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school
- ✓ Graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

Also, the earlier students receive the support that comes from family engagement, the better. After conducting its own research review, the educational nonprofit Waterford.org [concluded](#) that school-family partnerships formed during students' elementary school years created "a strong foundation for future student success and continued engagement."



# How to Get **Families** More Engaged

Many families don't know how to support their children's learning (sometimes they don't even know that they can). They may even be unaware that educators want to work with them. Instead, they may think they're doing their part by staying out of the way.

So, the first step in creating school-home partnerships is opening communication. Using one communication channel is usually not enough to reach all families. For example, a school using email for communication may find that some families don't have internet access. Also, a school that relies heavily on one-on-one meetings could encounter family-teacher scheduling conflicts. So, it's likely that a combination of approaches will be needed.

## TO DISTRIBUTE GENERAL INFORMATION, EDUCATORS COULD USE:

- ✓ Online portals
- ✓ Paper flyers
- ✓ Social media
- ✓ Newsletters

## MORE PERSONAL INTERACTIONS CAN BE CONDUCTED VIA:

- ✓ Email
- ✓ Mobile apps
- ✓ Telephone calls
- ✓ SMS text
- ✓ Live Streamed town hall meetings
- ✓ Face-to-face meetings (including home visits or after-hours office drop-ins)







When districts use multiple communication channels, it's important for teachers and administrators to coordinate the volume and timing of their communications. Families will feel overwhelmed if they receive multiple messages from their child's school every day. Worse, important missives could get buried in a deluge of regular announcements.

While scheduling conflicts may exist, one-on-one conversations between teachers and families can be invaluable. Regular conversations help both families and teachers develop a more comprehensive view of a student's character, interests, progress, and challenges.

**ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS ALSO GIVE TEACHERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO SUGGEST RESOURCES AND TECHNIQUES FOR HELPING STUDENTS OVERCOME LEARNING HURDLES OR IMPROVING THEIR AT-HOME STUDIES.**

Speaking one-on-one (especially face-to-face) makes it easier to prevent or address misunderstandings, so teacher-family relationships have a better chance of strengthening, which makes collaboration more likely and much easier.

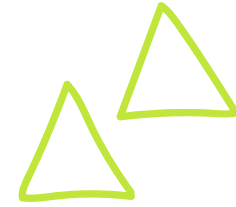
Since it will be difficult for both parties to meet face-to-face frequently, personal phone calls are another way to stay connected with students' families. Positive and consistent communication makes it easier for schools and families to cocreate strategies that enable families to stay informed and meaningfully involved in their children's learning. In other words, instead of the responsibility for figuring out strategies falling solely on educators' shoulders, families can share feedback and ideas.





## SOLUTIONS

# How Extended Day Enrichment Supports Family Engagement



Before and after school enrichment programs can extend the opportunities for school-related conversations, particularly when the programs are located on the school campus.

Children are usually eager to tell their families about programs' fun and stimulating activities. Those talks can strengthen familial relationships while providing families with insights into their child's interests and how they learn best. In turn, that information can motivate families to engage with their children's school in the ways previously described. **The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project** [confirms](#) that:

An enrichment program's response to family feedback can also produce positive school-family relations. When program staff make improvements based on families' requests or suggestions, families will be encouraged to share ideas with the regular school faculty. Additionally, when program staff respond to feedback about students' needs, students feel like valued members of the program (and school) community, which increases their sense of belonging in the program (and by extension, at school).

”  
**Enrichment programs can increase family engagement in schools, reporting “greater involvement in school events, increased assistance with homework, and more encouragement for reading.”**  
– The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project





Programs can also increase students' sense of belonging through service projects or events in which they display their skills or work (e.g., performances or exhibits) for their families.

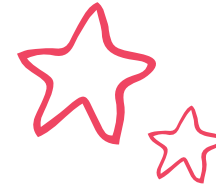
Working together on a service project or to prepare for an event builds community among students. Seeing the interest and approval of their families and friends during the showcase intensifies that communal feel. Since the events occur on school grounds, students associate these positive experiences with their school, strengthening their sense of belonging at school.

**ADDITIONALLY, FAMILIES WHO ARE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN'S ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS ARE LIKELY TO **SHARE** THEIR POSITIVE PROGRAM EXPERIENCES WITH OTHERS.**





# Educating Families on the Benefits of Extended Day



To bring about the benefits of family engagement, enrichment programs and schools first need to work together to get the initial set of families to register their children. While children are awake for approximately 6,000 hours a year, they spend only about 1,000 of those hours in school. Those remaining 5,000 hours represent a golden opportunity to enhance their educational experience and build skills for success.

The [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#) refers to the root of the achievement gap between higher- and lower-income students as an “opportunity gap.” And that gap is huge! The organization found that by the time students are in the sixth grade, economically-advantaged students have spent 6,000 more hours in out-of-school learning than their low-income peers.

1,000 HOURS

of additional support and educational stimulation per year can close the opportunity gap.

Fortunately, when students participate in onsite enrichment programs before and after school, they can spend up to five additional hours in school each day. That adds up to 1,000 extra hours of learning support and educational stimulation per year, which effectively closes the opportunity gap!

However, for families to engage with a program, they first must be able to access it. While locating the program on the school campus removes traveling constraints, many families, especially low-income families, also deal with financial constraints. Consequently, they’ll only be able to enroll their children if they receive financial assistance.

## THAT FINANCIAL SUPPORT CAN TAKE VARIOUS FORMS:

- ✓ Some enrichment programs may accept state and local childcare subsidies or state financial aid.
- ✓ Schools can fully or partially fund programs through federal stimulus bills — e.g., [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief](#) (ESSER) funding — or state programs — e.g., California’s [Expanded Learning Opportunities Program](#) (ELO-P).
- ✓ Schools or programs may be able to offer discounts to families who qualify for free or reduced lunch, teachers and staff, or scholarships for families in need.



# How Enrichment Programs Can Engage Families



Once families have agreed to enroll their children in the program, it's the job of the program staff to build relationships with those families. The NAFSCE definition of family engagement at the beginning of this guide aligns with the way Right At School approaches family engagement – as part of a holistic system of student support.

We partner with districts to find new ways to connect families to our programs and the larger community. And we build partnerships that put students in the center of everything we do.



## SOME OF THE WAYS ENRICHMENT PROGRAM STAFFERS CAN DEEPEN FAMILIES' ENGAGEMENT INCLUDE:

- ✓ Giving friendly greetings to families dropping off or picking up children
- ✓ Introducing families to each other
- ✓ Asking families for information about their children's needs
- ✓ Sharing information about the interesting things students do during program activities
- ✓ Keeping in regular contact with families via email, newsletters, bulletin boards, and in-person chats
- ✓ Holding events that allow children to display their skills for their families
- ✓ Providing a bridge between the family and the child's school when needed
- ✓ Helping families and schools work together to set goals for the students and working with outside specialists when necessary.



## PARTNERSHIPS

# Questions for Districts to Consider

Whether you are thinking of partnering with Right At School, currently have an enrichment partner, or are running your own enrichment programs, some questions you should be asking are:



What are the ways our extended day program engages families?



Are the extended day programs aligned to the family engagement goals of our school and district?



Is family engagement built into our extended day curriculum?



Are my extended day programs having a positive impact on the relationship families have with our school?







# How Right At School Engages Families

## **RIGHT AT SCHOOL EMPLOYS A MULTIFACETED MODEL OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT, AND THE BASIS OF THAT MODEL IS COMMUNICATION.**

Our family engagement efforts begin as soon as we partner with a school or district. Before our enrichment programs are even open, we host onsite or virtual open houses that facilitate a two-way flow of information. Families obtain details about our program, and we get to know their needs. We also participate in school and community events and hold our own “back to school” events.

However, the most important way in which Right At School staff communicate with families is via daily face-to-face interactions at pick up after school (or drop off in the case of before school programs). Those daily in-person communications are another opportunity for a two-way flow of information: our Program Managers keep families informed of their child’s successes and challenges while families can express any concerns they may have.

If there are issues that need to be resolved, Program Managers keep families updated on the steps being taken and follow up to ensure that families are satisfied with the way the issue has been resolved. In addition, families have direct phone and email access to their local Program Manager, Area Manager, and the Regional Director.

### **RIGHT AT SCHOOL ALSO COMMUNICATES WITH FAMILIES THROUGH THE FOLLOWING CHANNELS:**

- ✓ We maintain a web portal that puts program information and updates at families’ fingertips.
- ✓ We publish a monthly email newsletter for each local program.
- ✓ We place a communication board with program details (e.g., snack menus, program topics, etc.) at each sign-in/out location.
- ✓ We provide access to a customer service team that answers families’ questions and provides support with account changes or issues.
- ✓ We employ bilingual (Spanish-speaking) employees to meet the needs of non-English-speaking families.







# Right At School Can **Strengthen** Family Engagement for Schools and Districts

Since Right At School's program staff cultivates strong relationships with school leaders, teachers, and families, they often serve as a bridge between school and home. In addition to focusing on skills and subjects that help students succeed in school, program staff give kids a chance to focus on their own interests, too. They provide daily and consistent homework support, eliminating homework stress for families when they get home. They provide important school news and reminders to families, and they share parent feedback about students' needs during regular check-ins with school leaders and teachers.

That shared student information enables teachers to adjust their instructional approach or support for specific students. In turn, those modifications increase families' satisfaction with their children's education, which also increases their goodwill toward the school.

**ONSITE PROGRAMS LIKE RIGHT AT SCHOOL CAN PLAY AN INTEGRAL PART IN **SHARING** THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR REACHING OUT TO ENGAGE FAMILIES.**

For districts and schools, it's a capacity-building partnership; we increase the capacity to connect with families and provide students with support that bolsters success.

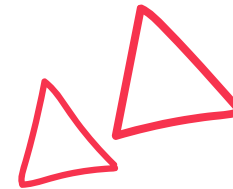
Right At School also seeks to form strong relationships with partner schools' parent teacher organizations or associations. Our staff don't just attend PTO/A meetings, often they also provide free childcare at the meetings.

The NAFSCE definition of family engagement at the beginning of this guide aligns with Right At School's approach to family engagement – as part of a holistic system of student support. We partner with districts to find new ways to connect families to our programs and the larger community. And we build partnerships that put students in the center of everything we do.





# Making Family Engagement Part of the RAS Curriculum



Throughout the course of the year, our Right Club curriculum builds opportunities for family and community engagement, in ways that allows students to demonstrate the skills they are building.

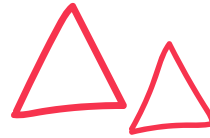
Through **Right Club Gives Back**, students work together on serve projects that support their neighbors and community. Together they identify potential projects based on local issues and needs, then plan and implement the project.

There is an entire module of the curriculum dedicated to variety shows, and every year programs across the country show off their amazing creativity and talents for their families. But the variety show module isn't just about performing—students plan and produce the show as well, applying their skills collaboratively to create skits, organize and craft props and set dressing, spread the word about the show, and more.

We also participate in a variety of cultural holidays and related activities throughout the year, often welcoming parent and community speakers to share their customers with students.



# It Takes a **Village**



**An increasing number of educators are considering how best to support students academically, socially, and emotionally**

While many families and educators think of before or after school programs as primarily childcare options, several schools and districts are finding that high-quality enrichment programs can be an important part of building a holistic system of student support.

By building strong partnerships that connect school, home, and community, education leaders can transform schools into learning hubs that empower students, support educators, and engage families.



RIGHT AT  
SCHOOL



## CONTACT US TODAY

Call us at **855-AT-SCHOOL** or visit our website to schedule a chat with a Right At School team member and discover how to expand equitable access to high-quality enrichment for all students that engages families, and connects school, home, and community.

**RIGHTATSCHOOL.COM**

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